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DE RUEHBK #1508/01 1751008
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 241008Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7338
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7202
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9778
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5587
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1710
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0015
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 6746

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 001508

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NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/22/2029

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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE JUNE 8
MOSQUE ATTACK AND A VICIOUS CYCLE OF REPRISALS

REF: A. BANGKOK 1388 (TWELVE KILLED IN MOSQUE ATTACK)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 1320 (TAK BAI DEATHS)

[1](#)C. BANGKOK 1271 (TARGETED KILLINGS)

[1](#)D. BANGKOK 1167 (LOCAL OFFICIALS VIEWS)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, REASON 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: The cycle of violence and reprisals in southern Thailand continues to spike in the aftermath of the May 29 Tak Bai post mortem inquest ruling which determined that security forces were merely performing their duties according to their responsibilities when 78 Malay Muslims died in their custody while being transported from Tak Bai to a detention facility in Pattani in 2004. The June 2 killing of two Buddhist teachers, including an eight months pregnant woman, and June 7 killing of a Buddhist rubber tapper by insurgents led directly to the June 8 massacre at a nearby mosque that left 11 dead, including the imam, and 12 injured.

Several embassy contacts claim that the gunmen involved in the mosque reprisal were associated with a volunteer defense organization formed and armed by a deputy Royal Aide-de Camp of Queen Sirikit. Insurgents reacted with particularly brutal fury in the two weeks after the mosque attack, targeting teachers, rubber tappers, Buddhist monks, and commuter buses with bombings and beheadings. Local authorities in Narathiwat and national leaders in Bangkok are aware of the identities of the perpetrators of the June 8 attack, according to our contacts. Meanwhile, Thai authorities are attempting to address the spike in violence by pledging more development assistance, more volunteer security forces, and consideration of a special administrative structure to govern the Deep South.

[1](#)2. (S) Comment: The link between those who participated in the mosque attack and a figure associated with the Queen, even absent any indication the mosque attack was ordered from above, greatly complicates efforts to investigate and punish the perpetrators and will further rile the waters in so-called "red zones" sympathetic to the insurgency. To date, the conflict in the South has not taken on the character of sectarian violence, with most of the victims local Malay Muslims attacked by the (Malay Muslim) insurgents; but the mosque attack and a lack of a clear RTG effort to pursue justice could give the insurgents additional

traction in the wake of the Tak Bai ruling. The June 8 mosque attack is the latest in a string of killings of imams suspected of links to the insurgency in recent years (ref C) that have outraged local communities and fed a sense of lack of justice.

¶3. (C) Comment, cont: The brutality of violence of the past three weeks likely surpasses any since the 2004 Tak Bai incident itself. We have seen no evidence that proposed budget increases for economic development in the South will quell the violence, or that more volunteer security forces will do anything but possibly fuel the violence. Although Prime Minister Abhisit's June 14 comments that the government supports a new administrative structure for governing southern Thailand are welcome, the challenges of implementation and overcoming resistance by the military to significant civilianization of the central government approach remain. End Summary and Comment.

Brutal cycle of reprisal attacks, Mosque in middle

¶4. (C) According to press sources, some 40 people have been killed and at least 100 injured in southern Thailand since May 29, when a Songkhla Court declined to assign responsibility for the deaths of 78 Malay Muslims who died while being transported to a military detention facility in Pattani in 2004, the so-called Tak Bai incident (ref B). According to Don Pathan, a long-time embassy contact on southern Thailand, the court ruling gave Malay extremists in southern Thailand a boost in support, initiated the recent spike in insurgency related violence, and lead in turn to "tit for tat" reprisals.

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¶5. (C) Most media attention has focused on the June 8 al-Furqon Mosque killings, when a group of masked gunmen allegedly armed with shotguns and M-16s sprayed the praying congregation at the al-Furqon Mosque, killing the imam and 10 others, and wounding 12 (ref A). Sources suggest two triggers of insurgents-on-Buddhists violence in nearby districts in the previous week: on June 2, insurgents killed two Buddhist school teachers, one eight months pregnant, in Rangae district, Narathiwat, while on their way home from school; on June 7, militants killed and mutilated Buddhist Thai rubber tapper Chuaj Nadee in the nearby village of Ba Pae the day prior to the mosque attack. Chuaj's slaying was meant as a trap for responding security forces, according to Human Rights Watch's Sunai Phasuk, though a planted bomb intended to kill the responders failed to detonate.

¶6. (S) Chuaj's outraged cousin, an ex-tahaan praan (para-military rangers who serve under commissioned army officers), allegedly gathered several of his fellow ex-tahaan praan friends now serving in Rengae district's volunteer defense force (called Or-Ror-Bor in Thai for the acronym for "Volunteer Citizens for Village Safety Protection") to attack the mosque the next day in revenge for Chuaj's death, according to Sunai, who has excellent contacts in both security forces and the insurgents; Don Pathan told us his sources indicate five people participated in the attack. The al-Furqon mosque's imam was a known insurgent leader, with some army intel sources claiming he had actually participated in killings, according to Sunai, and many of those who attended prayers were suspected to be associated with the insurgents - leading Chuaj's cousin and friends to target the mosque.

Potentially explosive royal connection

¶7. (S) The "Or-Ror-Bor" connection of several of the mosque gunmen is deeply unsettling to those in the know, according to a range of contacts, because the project's sponsor is GEN Naphon Boontap, Deputy Royal Aide-de-Camp, who has armed

village self defense groups in the south with shotguns under the patronage of the Queen. There is no indication the gunmen acted on instructions or informed anyone before attacking the mosque, but the connection to Naphon and indirectly to the Queen makes any effort to bring the perpetrators to justice complicated. Both Don Pathan and Sunai suggested that the June 8 mosque incident was likely not the first time "Or-Ror-Bor" personnel have been involved in killings in the deep south of insurgent-linked figures; we had heard similar rumors to this effect since late 2008, but without the specificity which has now emerged.

18. (S) Among officials working in the deep south to improve the situation and very concerned in the aftermath of the mosque attack, given the identity and association of the suspected assailants, are civil-military affairs coordinator MGEN Chalong and Grisada Boonrach, Vice Governor for security affairs in Yala province. Grisada told us June 18 that Army Chief Anupong Paochinda and Prime Minister Abhisit have been fully briefed on the information.

19. (S) Both Grisada and Sunai indicated that local residents in the area were well aware of who the perpetrators were; Sunai said that security forces contacts showed him insurgent pamphlets collected in the wake of a subsequent bombing of a commuter bus which specifically mentioned the Or-Ror-Bor connection and their protection by the Queen, though this information has not been shared with the media. For his part, Grisada told us that he is concerned about the impact the mosque attack and the aftermath will have on his own efforts to reduce the violence in Yala through community development work (ref D).

Bangkok responds with misdirects, bromides, and a proposal

110. (S) The RTG's initial declaration that the killings were perpetrated by the insurgents was, according to Don and

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Sunai, nonsense -- Cho-ai Rong is a very red district, with almost everyone being sympathetic to the militants' cause, and insurgents averse to attacking a mosque frequented by insurgent supporters during prayers. Comments about "outsiders" playing a role were likely designed to deflect attention to a possible link to the Queen-sponsored project, suggested Sunai.

111. (C) GEN Anupong, PM Abhisit, DPM Suthep, and a series of other RTG officials traveled to the deep south in the week following the mosque attack, amidst gruesome insurgent attacks on non-security forces, including a rubber tapper who was beheaded, his head impaled on a spike, his body quartered and burned. One insurgent leaflet left at the site of the commuter bus bombing read: "You attack our innocents, we attack yours." Public officials in Bangkok appear to be approaching the deteriorating security situation with their usual mix of rhetoric, pledges of development assistance, and increased security. In statements to the press, PM Abhisit said his government's strategy was rooted in the belief that the key to peace is justice and economic opportunity; Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban said the government would spend 54 billion baht (\$1.58 billion) in the south for economic development. Government Spokesman Panitan Wattanayaorn said the RTG would send another 1,440 "security volunteers" to the South to help maintain order.

112. (SBU) Separately, in a bid to reduce the tension in the South and to respond to criticism that his government has been ineffective in dealing with the violence, Abhisit said during his June 14 weekly television broadcast that his government was investigating the possibility of turning the violence-gripped provinces of Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani into a special administrative zone. He said any new administrative framework had to be in line with the constitution, and that this should not be confused with

self-rule. Abhisit vowed that his government would not negotiate with the insurgents, and claimed that the insurgents were attempting to internationalize the issue. He again stressed the need for justice, and said his government's strategy would focus on economic development of the Deep South. On the issue of who was behind the June 8 mosque attack, Abhisit made a neat side-step: if any one connected to security forces were to be implicated, such acts were not the policy of nor condoned by the government.

JOHN